ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-D

WASHINGTON TIMES
13 December 1985

CORD MEYER

Making it harder to spy on us

Given the tensions between the United States and the Soviet bloc and the American advantage in classified high technology, it is as certain as death and taxes that the Soviet KGB and its satellite intelligence services in Eastern Europe and Cuba will continue trying to expand their espionage operations in the United States.

The rash of recent arrests of U.S. citizens caught in the act of spying for the Soviet Union and other countries has brought into sharp public focus the reality of the espionage threat. No longer a fit subject only for escapist movies, the competence of U.S. counterintelligence is debated in Congress. We know now that deep damage can be done and want it stopped.

As a retired veteran of the intelligence wars, this columnist has canvassed the different agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community and found a surprising amount of agreement on the steps necessary to better protect our secrets and to improve counterintelligence performance.

Those on the front lines of the counter-spy business identify three urgent priority tasks. First, they would like to see a drastic reduction in the size of the official Soviet-bloc presence in this country and more severe limitations on its freedom of movement. Second, they would hope for more effective means of deterring those tempted to spy, and, finally, they need protection against the pervasive leaking of official secrets, both from within the executive branch and from the congressional oversight committees.

After many years of benign neglect, cutting back and reining in the more than 2,500 Soviet-bloc officials in this country is no easy task. One thousand of these are suspected of working for the KGB in the active recruitment of American spies. Some progress is being made toward reducing the number and imposing strict travel controls, but gaping loopholes remain.

For example, of the 55 Soviet-bloc journalists permanently assigned here, many are KGB-connected, as proved to be the case in London recently, where a Soviet defector identified six Russians claiming to be journalists among the 31 KGB agents expelled. In spite of their suspected espionage assignments, the 55 Soviet-bloc pseudo-journalists now in the United States are free to roam the country at will and to recruit American agents beyond the reach of FBI scrutiny.

Although both Soviet and most Eastern European officials in the bloc missions to the United Nations now are under travel restrictions that keep them within a 25-mile limit, there are so many of them that FBI surveillance has an almost impossible job trying to keep up with them in the crowded city. There is rising pressure in Congress to reduce the bloated Soviet U.N. mission to the size of the much smaller U.S. mission.

As the access of Russian spy masters to their American target is gradually reduced, there is an urgent need to make it more difficult and more costly for American citizens to risk selling their country's defense secrets. Although the polygraph machine is not completely reliable in detecting liars, it is a formidably effective investigative tool in the hands of a well-trained operator, and President Reagan has recently signed a directive calling for its more extensive use.

One of the convicted American spies, James D. Harper, recently told a Senate subcommittee that the threat of periodic lie-detector tests would have effectively deterred him, and it would have a similar impact on many others tempted by big bucks.

Another drastic action under serious consideration is the possible reimposition of the death penalty in cases where deep and lasting damage has been done to national security. Sen. William Roth, Republican from Delaware, has introduced a bill that would allow the court to decide whether to impose the death sentence in cases of major espionage, and Reagan administration officials are weighing the possible advantages against the danger of stirring up a constitutional controversy.

Finally, the American intelligence community is acutely aware of the fact that Soviet espionage is a worldwide phenomenon and not directed uniquely against the United States. Soviet defectors to England and to other Western allies can provide information, if shared, that can be vital to U.S. security, and vice versa. NATO cooperation in the counterintelligence field has, in fact, played a critical role in rooting out Soviet spy networks on many occasions.

This allied cooperation on sensitive intelligence matters now is endangered by the frequency and seriousness of the leaks that have appeared in the American press. While the concerned agencies blame the House and Senate intelligence committees for these disclosures, the congressional committees accuse the executive branch. Appalled by this spectacle, America's European allies are increasingly unwilling to share their secrets with us.

In this deteriorating situation, there is growing support in the Congress for the proposal of Rep. Henry Hyde, Republican from Illinois, to merge the two intelligence committees into a single, joint committee with a much-reduced membership and a small professional staff. It may turn out to be the best way of restoring the confidence of our European allies and of rebuilding the counterintelligence cooperation essential to containing the KGB.